

## Effective Note-Taking

When reading texts, it is important that you try to consider what is effective about the writing. There are key areas you can look at when taking notes on your text which are listed below quoting or providing examples as you go. Not all areas will be relevant to your text, and you will have to decide which are most appropriate.

<b>a) Characters</b>	Remember that a character is seldom important as an individual. The author makes the character act in a certain way in order to show his or her ideas on the central theme.
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### Some Questions to consider:

1. Who is the main character and **how** do you learn what kind of person he/she is? What incident is used to show this character at the beginning?
2. How does the character change? Look for specific key incidents which show a change in attitude. Is the author making a point about people?
3. Are the characters realistic? How does the writer make them so?
4. Is the main character in conflict with someone? Does the conflict come to a climax in a particular incident? How is the conflict resolved?
5. Are there any characters who seem to be opposites? How is this shown in the text? What point is the author making?
6. Is the character a symbol of an idea — justice, ordinary man, rebellion, etc?
7. Is the character meant to be a typical product of a certain society?
8. How do you feel about the characters? Does this change as the text develops?

<b>b) Setting</b>	As well as creating characters and giving them things to do, the author deliberately creates a specific society or setting in which they live.
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### Some Questions to consider:

1. Where and when is the action set? Is this important for the main theme?
2. Is the author writing about the divisions in society?
3. Is the main character in conflict with society?
4. Does the author approve of, or condemn, the society she/he is writing about?
5. What do **you** think about the values of that society, or the values that the author seems to be supporting?
6. Is the setting in **time** important, eg// World War I, Victorian Society, Autumn/Winter/Summer.
7. How does the setting in time affect the characters' actions?
8. How does the author use the setting in time to highlight a theme? eg// War
9. How is the setting made convincing?

<b>c) Style</b>	The way an author uses language techniques can help build up a clear picture or help bring the text to life.
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### Some Questions to consider:

1. Are there any techniques the author uses frequently?
2. Is the style satirical, humorous, in the form of a fantasy, diary, or very descriptive?
3. Is it very personal giving lots of information on how the main character feels?
4. Who is the narrator? Is this important? Is there more than one narrative?
5. Are you left to draw your own conclusions about the characters and their emotions?
6. Is the language very formal, or do the characters speak in dialect? Does this make it more realistic? Do you feel differently about the characters because of this?
7. What is the tone of the text? Is it serious, comic, sympathetic, hostile, ironic, or persuasive?
8. Is there an incident that is typical of the author's style?
9. Does the author use description skilfully to create mood?
10. Comment on particular figures of speech which are effective (metaphor/simile/etc).

**d) Structure**

How a writer places the events and incidents in a text can have a powerful effect on a reader. It can move from a happy scene to a tragic one, pleasant to horrific, or can show you how lives change over time. Lack of sequence can reflect a confused world.

**Some Questions to consider:**

1. What is the overall sequence of events in the novel? (eg// chronological?)
2. Does it deal with several generations?
3. Does the author use flashback?
4. Are there several plots being carried out at one time? If so, why?
5. How effective is the opening of the text? (Evidence)
6. Does the text build to a climax or turning point or is there an anti-climax or cliff-hanging ending?
7. Is the story allegorical – i.e. working on two levels at the one time? On the surface, the story might be about a series of adventures, but underneath the characters and events could stand for or symbolise something much more important. (Evidence)

**e) Theme**

Quality literature will be more than just a good story. Most works, whether they are novels, plays, poetry, biography will be about an issue with a deeper significance. The writer then uses the plot, character and a host of other techniques to show you what he/she thinks about that issue and to make you question your views and values. Some common themes are listed below.

<b>Conflict</b>	–	the individual versus adults / authority / society
<b>Passage of time</b>	–	through character development, societal change
<b>Relationships</b>	–	mother/son, husband/wife, male/female, between classes
<b>Prejudice</b>	–	racial, religious, east/west, wealth
<b>Social problems</b>	–	values of society, drugs, role of women, misuse of power

**Identify the themes in your text. Consider what the author is saying about them, and how she/he conveys this message.**

**e) Personal Reaction**

Try to show how you feel about the ideas, issues and characters in the text. Above all, the SQA want to know what **you** thought about the text, not what someone else has to say about it. In the notes above, you have already been including your own reaction to different areas of the text.

**Some Questions to consider:**

1. Did the text make you see something in a different light?
2. Does he/she present a problem or a solution to a problem? Your reaction?
3. How do you feel about the main character(s)?
4. Do you sympathise with them, or do they make you angry?
5. Does the author present a realistic view of society as it exists or might exist?